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ABSTRACT

A panel of student teachers reviewed information on perceived student teaching needs prior to and following special education student teaching experiences, focusing on needs regarding communication with the cooperating teacher. The panel created several lists of positive verbal and written supports for the special education student teacher. Uses of nonverbal communication were also reviewed. Four general techniques for enhancing the relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher were identified: (1) quality time with the cooperating teacher; (2) a system of effective dialogue; (3) a change of self in the student teaching role; and (4) becoming aware of others with consideration of their needs. Lists of suggested positive words and phrases are attached. (DB)

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Effective Communication in Special Education Student Teaching

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Running head: EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

This project identified the effective communication information needed by student teachers and cooperating teachers in successful special education student teaching experiences. Previously, data had been collected from student teachers prior to their student teaching as well as student teachers who had completed student teaching through Illinois universities in a study by Raidl and Graham (1994). Several of the most important aspects of a successful student teaching experience, having good communication channels and clear communications with the cooperating teacher, were explored. Project findings indicate that four key areas include quality time with the cooperating teacher, establishing a clear system of dialogue, changing self in the student teaching role, and becoming aware of others with consideration of their needs.

Effective Communication in Special Education Student Teaching

Essential communication information will impact the success of special education student teachers in the field. Camp (1994) addressed communication in several of the 10 tips to help make the most of a special education student teaching experience. In particular, communication needs paralleled the major suggestions identified in this project. Effective communication information needed by student teachers and cooperating teachers in successful special education student teaching experiences includes discussion of the expectations of the cooperative teacher, expectations of the student teacher, review of the needs of students in the classroom, rules and expectation of the school in which an individual is placed, and communication skills on a variety of levels. Literature on this particular topic has been limited. There does not appear to be much field-based research completed that involves special education student teachers' first hand comments on the important communication aspects of their experiences. In one of the most recent field-based studies, Raidl and Graham (1994) identified seven key areas most important to student teaching which were dependent upon participant involvement. These key areas included communication with cooperating teachers, ability to flexible, knowledge of student teaching requirements, communication with university supervisors, ability to keep an open mind, communication on a

variety of levels and development of personal qualities. The most important area identified by Raidl and Graham (1994) was communication with the cooperating teacher.

In an earlier study by Hoffman (1982), it was found that seventy percent of questionnaire responses indicated the most significant other as the cooperating teacher. Raidl and Graham's (1994) research supported this and extended knowledge that the most important area was communication with the cooperating teacher. Furthermore, communication was the most important element in the teacher and student teacher relationship. Effective communication is part of the student teacher evaluation according to Ebbers & Brandt-Kemezis (1992). Some suggestions for communication during student teaching may be found in Wentz and Yarling (1994).

Method

A panel of student teachers reviewed information on perceived prior and post student teaching needs in special education throughout the state of Illinois at identified Illinois higher education universities and colleges. These universities were identified from the University of New Mexico Outreach Alliance Project list (1992) which were cross referenced with a list from the Illinois State Board of Education. Then the panel created several lists of positive verbal and written supports for the special education student teacher, with the view that not all of the reinforcers generated would or should be used in every student teaching situation. Some words and phrases might be appropriate and

unique to particular situations and not to other situations. These single words may encourage and support the student teacher. They may be used as one word or as part of a phrase. Use the words that you are most comfortable using. State each word honestly with meaning and enthusiasm! Examples of these positive words are listed in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here

Table 2 contains examples of positive phrases that might encourage and reinforce a student teacher. These were generated for use in situations where the phrases would be appropriate and meaningful. They may be used as a phrase or as part of a sentence. Only use the phrases that you are comfortable using.

Insert Table 2 about here

Suggested circumstances for using positive statements that might reinforce a student teacher were discussed by the panel. The positive words and phrases which may encourage and support the student teacher should be used as frequently as appropriate in situations where they will be meaningful. They may be used in a variety of school circumstances as long as they do not disrupt any student or learner activity. There are some possible situations to consider in special education student teaching. These circumstances were

identified and are located in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

The panel also identified a need to encourage and support student teachers to improve their performances on certain occasions. Phrases or parts of sentences that encourage and support the student teacher to do better are given in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

Nonverbal communication must be reviewed also. Meese, R. L. (1994) discussed messages sent by body posture, facial expressions, gestures, and eye contact. Both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher may want to view a videotape of teaching together for ideas.

Results and Discussion

The panel was able to identify several useful techniques to enhance a positive relationship and facilitate effective communication between a student teacher and a cooperating teacher. These four techniques include the following: quality time with the cooperating teacher, a system of effective dialogue, a change of self in the student teaching role, and becoming aware of others with consideration of their needs.

It is important for the student teacher to develop

quality time with the cooperating teacher. There are many ways for a student teacher to develop this technique. First, the student teacher can arrange time before or after school for the convenience of the cooperating teacher. This can be a short but productive period of time for the student teacher and the cooperating teacher to briefly state their feelings on daily events. Next, a time should be set aside each week for the student teacher and the cooperating teacher to sit down and have a discussion about the week's activities. In addition, monthly meetings should be scheduled to discuss strengths and weaknesses as well as progress, concerns, teaching styles, and strategies to use with children and youth who have special needs.

Setting up a system of dialog is another important technique for effective communication in a student teaching experience. A journal system to be shared between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher may be used to express concerns and answer questions. This system may be used as a supplement or in place of oral communication when there is no appropriate time to talk face-to-face. Another system to explore is the use of comment cards. Instead of a journal, the student teacher and cooperating teacher quickly can write comments they may have on an index card. Then the index cards can be placed on either the student teacher's or cooperating teachers desk for quick reference. Videotapes also can be used for communication. A suggestion was made that the student teacher be videotaped three times during

their student teaching experience. These tapes should be viewed by the cooperating teacher and the student teacher together to pick out strengths and weaknesses. Then they can discuss progress and build techniques to accomplish their common goals and objectives for the students. Use of new communication devices such as with the Enhanced Communication Technique being developed might provide a quick and useful link between the teacher and the student teacher in the classroom.

All student teachers hope to be placed with a compatible cooperating teacher. Although this does not always occur. When a student teacher is in a situation where the cooperating teacher holds opposite views or philosophies about teaching, the student teacher must adjust. This is the time for the student teacher to change oneself. The student teacher needs to examine his or her own motives, apprehensions, pressures, and concerns. The student teacher needs to acquire a take charge personality in a responsible way. To accomplish this change in self, the student teacher should try to adjust to the cooperating teacher's expectations while maintaining valued ideals, beliefs, and self-expectations.

A fourth area involves techniques a student teacher should use to maintain effective communication with the cooperating teacher by being aware of others and considering their needs. The student teacher should show an appreciation for the experience of the cooperating teacher, recognize

one's own competencies and skills, and observe how the classroom and lessons are organized. The student teacher should model the effective techniques of the cooperating teacher without sacrificing ideals and convictions. When the student teacher has techniques of his or her own to experiment with in the classroom, that should be communicated to the cooperating teacher. Together they should decide when and how these techniques can be implemented.

Recommendations

All of these techniques for effective communication between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher are desired. By keeping the communication lines open, both the special education student teacher and cooperating teacher will have a successful and rewarding experience together. The next area to explore is student teacher and university supervisor communications.

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Table 1

Positive Words That Might Reinforce A Student Teacher

Positive Words
Able
Ace
Admirable
Brilliant
Choice
Clever
Commendable
Conscientious
Congratulations
Consummate
Efficient
Elegant
Enjoyable
Excellent
Exceptional
Exemplary
Expert
Fantastic
Fine
Good
Great
Keen

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Positive Words
Marvelous
Meritorious
Momentous
Nice
Outstanding
Perfect
Phenomenal
Remarkable
Sensational
Sharp
Super
Superb
Terrific
Tremendous
Valuable
Wonderful
Wow

Table 2

Positive Phrases That Might Reinforce A Student Teacher

Positive Phrases
A capital idea
Ace teaching
Admirable job with the students
An achievement
An expert job
An illustrative presentation
A precious reaction to dealing with your child who ...
A worthy endeavor
Banner work
Brilliant plan
Choice activity
Clever in the way you just handled that situation
Commendable work on the ...
Conscientious planning shows where you ...
Congratulations on a job well done
Considerable skill
Consummate directions
Deserving of merit
Definitely a success
Definitely beneficial to the students when you ...
Distinguished work
Efficient directions for the students

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Positive Phrases
Elegant details and preparation shows in your work
Enjoyable activity
Exactly right
Excellent job
Exceptional activity
Exemplary planning on your part
Expert observation and direction of the students
Fantastic lesson
Fine work
Good comeback
Good for you
Good job decoding feelings
Good use of giving students praise
Good use of humor
Good work
Great idea
Great positive statement
Huge success
I knew you could do it
I like that you ...
Immeasurable gain noted
Immense preparation evident
Keen observing

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Positive Phrases
Keep going
Keep it up
Marvelous job
Meritorious work
Momentous occasion when students learn because of you
Most favorable
Most satisfactory
Nice job
Notable accomplishment
Outstanding when you ...
Perfect planning
Phenomenal carry through
Pure skill shown
Remarkable insight shown with the students
Right on
Sensational materials you came up with in this lesson
Sharp observation on your part
Skilled presentation
Sufficient time length, good
Super performance
Superb lesson
Terrific timing on your part
That's better than ever

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Positive Phrases
That's coming along nicely
That's great
That's the way
That was first class
The students are eager to learn
Those were important points
Tremendous lesson
Valuable activity that you chose
Very clever of you when ...
Very complete
Very creative
Very exact
Very gracious of you when ...
Very kind
Very motivating
Very thorough
What you've done is nice
Wonderful work
Wow, I'm impressed
You answered that question well
You are very fair to the students
You are very good at that
You did it fine

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Positive Phrases
You did that very well
You handled that nicely
You haven't missed a thing
Your plans were good

Table 3

Suggested Circumstances For Using Positive Statements That Might Reinforce A Student Teacher

Suggested Circumstances
After something positive happens for reinforcement
After something negative happens so that the student teacher is encouraged to keep trying and has teacher support
During any time that the teacher recognizes or notices student teacher frustration building
At the end of a lesson
Prior to the beginning of a lesson for encouragement and support
During the lesson, at a point in time when it won't disrupt the student teacher or students
During a crisis situation for team based support
During any down time for encouragement and support
During independent practice, a quiet verbal support or positive gesture may be appreciated
During prep period (if one is available!)
Always at the end of the day

Table 4

Ways To Say You Can Do Better

Ways To Do Better
One more time and you will have it
That's better
You've just about got it
You've just about mastered that
Don't give up!
Keep trying...You'll get it yet
Keep working...it looks like you've almost got it
Be more specific about...
Can you expand on this?
Good first draft, now you need to polish it by ...
At least it shows you were trying
That is coming along, now...